

Understand Your Stress: Keep a Stress Diary

By [Jenna Birch](#) , January 15, 2016

Whether it is a major deadline at work or an argument with your significant other, you are probably very familiar with stress. Stress is part of the human condition.

When you encounter a stress trigger, your body's natural fight-or-flight response kicks in to overcome the "danger." Hormones that ready your body for action are released, including cortisol (a.k.a. "the stress hormone") and the results can be toxic.

In the short-term, you may experience uncomfortable symptoms like sweaty palms, a rising heart rate, fatigue, irritability, upset stomach, restlessness or a lack of motivation as a result of stress. Long-term, chronic stress can lead to catastrophic issues like high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes. You also might be develop bad behavior habits — smoking, eating too much, eating too little — as an unhealthy coping mechanism for your stressors.

How can you fix this? Keeping a stress diary, so you understand what activities and events tend to trigger symptoms. Here is how to start:

1. Grab a notebook or a journal and make three columns.
2. In the first column, record your moments of throughout your day. Date each entry and write down the exact time you experienced the stressor.
3. In the second column, write down your immediate reaction to the stressor (anger, crying, etc.) and rate it from 1 to 10. Also record any physical or mental symptoms you experienced afterward (headache, stomachache, poor concentration, etc).
4. In the last column, explain how you're going to deal with the stressor the next time it occurs. For instance, maybe you will take a walk to cool off after the argument, or call a friend to talk through your work project when it feels overwhelming.

The exercise of keeping the stress diary gives you insight into the range of stress that you experience throughout your day. You will be able to see the times of day, people and situations that lead to the biggest problems, *and* brainstorm better solutions for dealing with problems in the future.

Stress is unavoidable, but you can get ahead of it by getting to the bottom of those triggers — all you need is a notebook and a little space for pondering.

Sources:

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-body.aspx>

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